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THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND THE DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERAN AFFAIRS COLLABORATE TO CREATE VETERANS' SYSTEMS NAVIGATOR SERVICES

LOS ANGELES (Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2009) – The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) and the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs (DMVA) announced a collaborative effort to help veterans and their families obtain needed services.

LACDMH Director M J. Southard and LACDMVA Director Colonel J. Smith have combined department resources to celebrate the first Systems Navigator Team, specifically designed to help veterans navigate both systems to get their needs met.

"This collaborative use of Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds is a down payment on getting our veterans the help they need," said Dr. Southard, a strong advocate for Veteran's mental health services.

"The training and concerted Commitment of Federal, State and County governments, veteran organizations and non-profit service providers to address the mental health issues of our returning combat veterans is the first step forward in providing them meaningful assistance. Success in today's economic climate depends on our ability to collaborate and coordinate both our efforts and resources," Colonel Joseph Smith said.

This collaboration will provide:

- Veteran system navigators assisting approximately 3,000 transitional age youth (16-25 years of age), adult, and older veterans.
- A pilot project that will utilize Military Veterans engaging Veterans and their families to identify supports and services tailored to the particular cultural, ethnic, age and gender identity of those seeking assistance.
- Four full time System Navigators engaging in joint planning efforts with community partners such as: veteran's groups, Veterans Affairs (VA), community based organizations, other county departments, schools, health service programs, faith-based organizations, self-help and advocacy groups to increase access to mental health services and strengthen the network of services available to veterans.
- System Navigators will develop effective working relationships with a number of community based agencies that serve veterans as well as other programs that can address the unique needs of veterans who may be undergoing mental health problems including community colleges, housing programs, social service agencies.
- System Navigators will perform outreach and engage homeless veterans and those in danger of becoming homeless and assist them in obtaining veteran housing.

Why collaborate?

LACDMH and DMVA recognize that the knowledge and skills required to truly serve the needs of those who have faced the circumstances of the Middle East combat zone extend beyond what is available in any single organization. Partnerships between multiple agencies are required to effectively meet the unique needs of returning veterans and their families.

Chris Contreras, L.C.S.W., [LACDMH](#) Manager of Veteran Services, is optimistic that the collaboration between LACDMH and DMVA will be the first of many partnerships formed between county departments, public and private agencies and veteran service organizations to meet the varied needs of our veterans and their families.

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